



paper pondshell (paper floater)

Utterbackia imbecillis

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Mollusca
Class: Bivalvia

Features

The paper pondshell or paper floater mussel has a long, oblong shell that is very thin. The anterior end of the shell is rounded and the posterior is pointed. The smooth, shiny exterior of the shell is light yellow in young individuals, while adults have a brownish green shell, sometimes with green rays. The inside of the shell is white or bluish-white. The paper pondshell grows to four inches long.

Natural History

The paper pondshell lives in ponds, lakes, and the mud-bottomed pools of creeks and rivers. Freshwater mussel distribution in Iowa is not well documented. They have an elaborate reproductive system. During spawning, males release sperm into the water. The sperm are drawn inside the female's shell, where they fertilize eggs in her body. The fertilized eggs develop into larvae (glochidia) and are stored for a time in the female's gills. When the glochidia mature, the female generally expels them into the water where they must attach as parasites to the gills or fins of fish. Larvae remain on the host fish for a period of weeks or months. Young mussels then detach from their host

and drop to the bottom of the body of water. Mussels are filter-feeders, bringing in water and the organic matter it contains through the incurrent siphon, filtering the particles out, then sending the rest of the water away from the body through the excurrent siphon. Particles filtered include plankton and detritus. Mature mussels spend most of their lives, which range from 10 to 100 years, partially or wholly buried in the bottom substrate.

Habitats

interior rivers and streams; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; Mississippi River

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

northeastern 1/2 of Iowa

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.